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### The Mineola Twins, press

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**TODAY'S QUOTE:** This would "dramatically remove ... perfectly legitimate voters from the rolls."

—Sen. Hob Bryan, D-Amory, speaking about election legislation under consideration; story on 1A

# PAGE 3

THE COMMERCIAL DISPATCH / WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2008

## Latest MSU Theatre production takes audience across decades

By Skip Descant

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STARKVILLE — Hold on to your seats if you plan on hanging out with "The Mineola Twins."

This latest performance from the Mississippi State University Theatre department will take you briskly across four decades of American pop culture and the minefield of sibling rivalry.

In this bouncy performance, described as "six scenes and four dreams," Myrna and Myra, a set of twins, which Myra — played by Kristin James — says are as different as "Wonder bread and croissants," shows what happens when two people refuse to see past their narrow, straight-jacketed worlds.

One sister, Myrna, played by Maggie Spann, is a picture of play-by-the-rules conformity, who over the course of the play's 40-year time frame evolves into an Anita Bryant-like right-wing extremist hosting a talk radio show that stops just short of advocating the bombing of women's clinics.

While Myra basks in her bong-hitting countercultural sexual rebellion.

"Multi-cultural, tofu-eating femi-Nazi," is the way Myrna broods over her sister's life in one of the play's final scenes.

"This play has history," said MSU faculty director Jo Durst, during "The Mineola Twins" dress rehearsal intermission Monday night, touching on the various levels of education and experience the play offers.

"And you can do experi-

*"This play has history."*

**Jo Durst**

*MSU faculty director*

mental pieces," added Durst of the small black box theater in McComas Hall where "The Mineola Twins" will be performed. "It pushes it to a certain edge."

"The Mineola Twins," written by Paula Vogel, may be just the play for student actors, finding their voice, and learning the ropes, so to speak.

Because this is not a play with a vast dimension to it — so unlike Vogel's earlier play "How I Learned to Drive," a Pulitzer Prize-winning piece exploring pedophilia. Instead, "Mineola Twins," with its soundtrack stretching from Jimi Hendrix to Madonna, is more caricature than character. Vogel has so carefully boxed both Myra and Myrna into neat closets and satirical sound bites so that they never really take on a complexity and depth to make them interesting. It's only in the final scenes where they both begin to peek out, of their own preconceived safety of Long Island and the Lower East Side.

Though what's clever is the two are actually more alike than they may ever acknowledge. They both end up going to jail and both have sons who adore their aunt more than each one's own mom. And both Myrna and Myra fail to spend enough time with their sons.

A somehow appropriate worst fear for Myrna is that her son Kenny — played cleverly by a wispy Jarrod Bates — might grow up to be a "hair



Skip Descant/Dispatch Staff

From left, Mississippi State University students Jarrod Bates, playing the part of Kenny, and Maggie Spann, playing the part of Myrna, perform in the MSU Theatre production "The Mineola Twins." The show runs today through Friday in the McComas Hall Lab Theater.

stylist or an interior decorator." So she sends him off to military school, if only to bunt him up.

"For the rest of his life Kenny will have a straight spine," she hopes.

While Myra's son Ben, also played by Bates, adores his right-wing aunt and goes to see her on the set of her radio

show, "Concerned Americans for America."

The set for "Mineola Twins" is effective for the sort of intimate house this play is performed in, where simple set pieces like square and rectangular wooden gray boxes get rearranged like Legos during scene changes and never detract from the actors.

Which is a bonus, because this cast does a decent job with the material, even if the play never really scratches beneath its Kodachrome surface.

"The Mineola Twins" runs Wednesday through Friday in the McComas Hall Lab Theater. Admission is \$5. And the production recommends mature audiences only.